THE
MINSTREL;
OR,
THE PROGRESS OF GENIUS.
A POEM.

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THE MINSTREL;

OR,

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A POEM.

BOOK THE FIRST.

ME VERO PRIMUM DULCES ANTE OMNIA MUSÆ,
QUARUM SACRA FERO, INGENTI PERCULSUS AMORE,
ACCIPIANT. —— VIRGIL.

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MDCCLXXI.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE firſt hint of this performance was ſuggeſted by Mr PERCY's ingenious *Eſſay on the Engliſh Minſtrels*, prefixed to his firſt volume of RELIQUES OF ANCIENT ENGLISH POETRY, publiſhed by Mr Dodſley in the year 1765.

My deſign was, to trace the progreſs of a Poetical Genius, born in a rude and illiterate age, from the firſt dawnings of fancy and reaſon, till that period at which he may be ſuppoſed capable of ſupporting the character of A MINSTREL, that is, of an itinerant poet and muſician; — a character which, according to the notions of our forefathers, was not only reſpectable, but ſacred. A poetical illuſtration of ſuch a ſubject ſeemed to promiſe variety of amuſement, and even ſome topics of inſtruction both moral and philoſophical. Perhaps I miſtook it, as well as my own abilities: however, in making a trial there could not be much harm. My Friends are pleaſed with what I have done; but, as they cannot entirely acquit themſelves of partiality, adviſe me to lay a ſpecimen before the Public.

The purſuits and amuſements of THE MINSTREL's childhood and early youth are deſcribed in this Firſt Book; which, if the title

were altered, and a few phraſes ſtruck out that refer to a ſequel, might perhaps be conſidered as a ſort of whole by itſelf. The incidents that qualify him for his profeſſion, and determine him to enter upon it, will furniſh materials for the Books that are to follow. If this be honoured with the public approbation, I ſhall think it has merit ſufficient to juſtify my beſtowing ſome time in finiſhing what remains, which is already in great forwardneſs. Should it be unſucceſsful, I will, with no great concern, relinquiſh a ſcheme, which cannot be completed without ſuch an expence of time and thought as a perſon in my way of life cannot eaſily ſpare. If, as the critics tell us, the chief end of poetry is to pleaſe, ſurely the man who writes verſes with ſome inconvenience to himſelf, and without any pleaſure to the public, ſpends his time to very little purpoſe.

I have endeavoured to imitate SPENSER, not in his allegory, or antiquated dialect, which, though graceful in him, appear ſometimes aukward in modern writers, but in the meaſure and harmony of his verſe, and in the ſimplicity and variety of his compoſition. All antiquated expreſſions I have ſtudiouſly avoided; admitting however ſome old words, where they ſeemed peculiarly ſuitable to the ſubject: but I hope none will be found that are now obſolete, or in any degree unintelligible to a reader of Engliſh poetry.

To

To thoſe who may be diſpoſed to aſk, what could induce me to write in ſo difficult a meaſure, I can only anſwer, that it pleaſes my ear, and ſeems, from its Gothic ſtructure and original, to bear ſome relation to the ſubject and ſpirit of the poem. It admits both ſimplicity and magnificence of ſound and language, beyond any other ſtanza that I am acquainted with. It allows the ſententiouſneſs of the couplet, and ſomething too of the diverſified cadence and complicated modulation of blank verſe. What ſome of our critics have remarked, of its uniformity growing at laſt tireſome to the ear, will be found to hold true, only when the Poetry is faulty in other reſpects.

THE

THE

MINSTREL;

OR,

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I.

AH! who can tell how hard it is to climb
The ſteep where Fame's proud temple ſhines afar!
Ah! who can tell how many a ſoul ſublime
Hath felt the influence of malignant ſtar,
And waged with Fortune an eternal war!
Check'd by the ſcoff of Pride, by Envy's frown,
And Poverty's unconquerable bar,
In life's low vale remote hath pined alone,
Then dropt into the grave, unpitied and unknown!

II.

And yet, the languor of inglorious days
Not equally oppreſſive is to all.
Him, who ne'er liſten'd to the voice of praiſe,
The ſilence of neglect can ne'er appal.
There are, who, deaf to mad Ambition's call,
Would ſhrink to hear th' obſtreperous trump of Fame;
Supremely bleſt, if to their portion fall
Health, competence, and peace. Nor higher aim
Had He, whoſe ſimple tale theſe artleſs lines proclaim.

III.

This ſapient age diſclaims all claſſic lore;
Elſe I ſhould here in cunning phraſe diſplay,
How forth The Minstrel fared in days of yore,
Right glad of heart, though homely in array;
His waving locks and beard all hoary grey:
And, from his bending ſhoulder, decent hung
His harp, the ſole companion of his way,
Which to the whiſtling wind reſponſive rung:
And ever as he went ſome merry lay he ſung.

IV.

Life's ſlender ſuſtenance his only meed;
'Twas all he hoped, and all his heart deſired.
And ſuch Dan Homer was, if right I read,
Though with the gifts of every muſe inſpired.
O when ſhall modern bard like him be fired!
Give me but leiſure to attend his lays,
I care not, though my rhymes be ne'er admired.
For ſweeter joy his matchleſs ſtrain ſhall raiſe
Than courts or kings can yield, with penſions, poſts, and praiſe.

V.

Fret not thyſelf, thou man of modern ſong,
Nor violate the plaiſter of thy hair;
Nor to that dainty coat do aught of wrong;
Elſe how ſhalt thou to Ceſar's hall repair?
(For, ah! no damaged coat can enter there).
Fret not thyſelf, that I, a ſimple wight,
Of thee, and thy trim brethren, take no care,
But of a poor old-faſhion'd pilgrim write,
Whom thou wouldſt ſhun, I ween, as moſt unſeemly ſight.

VI.

Surely the female heart is much belied
By thoſe who brand it with the luſt of gain.
The generous Muſes Fortune's ſmile deride,
Nor ever bow the knee in Mammon's fane:
For their delights are with the village-train,
Whom Nature's laws and Nature's charms engage:
They hate the covetous, and ſcorn the vain;
The paraſite ne'er won their patronage;—
Witneſs the ſilken bards of this illuſtrious age.

VII.

Though richeſt hues the peacock's plumes adorn,
Yet horror ſcreams from his diſcordant throat.
Riſe, ſons of harmony, and hail the morn,
While warbling larks on ruſſet pinions float;
Or ſeek at noon the woodland ſcene remote,
Where the grey linnets carol from the hill.
O let them ne'er, with artificial note,
To pleaſe a tyrant, ſtrain the little bill,
But ſing what heaven inſpires, and wander where they will.

VIII.

Liberal, not laviſh, is kind Nature's hand;
Nor was perfection made for man below.
Yet all her ſchemes with niceſt art are plann'd,
Good counteracting ill, and gladneſs wo.
With gold and gems if Chilian mountains glow,
If bleak and barren Scotia's hills ariſe;
There plague and poiſon, luſt and rapine grow;
Here peaceful are the vales, and pure the ſkies,
And freedom fires the ſoul, and ſparkles in the eyes.

IX.

Then grieve not, thou to whom th' indulgent Muſe
Vouchſafes a portion of celeſtial fire;
Nor blame the partial Fates, if they refuſe
Th' imperial banquet, and the rich attire.
Know thine own worth, and reverence the lyre.
Wilt thou debaſe the heart which God refined?
No; let thy heaven-taught ſoul to heaven aſpire,
To fancy, freedom, harmony, reſign'd;
Ambition's groveling crew for ever left behind.

X.

Canſt thou forego the pure ethereal ſoul
In each fine ſenſe ſo exquiſitely keen,
On the dull couch of Luxury to loll,
Stung with diſeaſe, and ſtupefied with ſpleen;
Fain to implore the aid of Flattery's ſcreen,
Even from thyſelf thy loathſome heart to hide,
(The manſion then no more of joy ſerene),
Where fear, diſtruſt, malevolence, abide,
And impotent deſire, and diſappointed pride?

XI.

O how canſt thou renounce the boundleſs ſtore
Of charms which Nature to her votary yields!
The warbling woodland, the reſounding ſhore,
The pomp of groves, and garniture of fields;
All that the genial ray of morning gilds,
And all that echoes to the ſong of even,
All that the mountain's ſheltering boſom ſhields,
And all the dread magnificence of heaven,
O how canſt thou renounce, and hope to be forgiven!

XII.

Theſe charms ſhall work thy ſoul's eternal health,
And love, and gentleneſs, and joy, impart.
But theſe thou muſt renounce, if luſt of wealth
E'er win its way to thy corrupted heart;
For, ah! it poiſons like a ſcorpion's dart;
Prompting th' ungenerous wiſh, the ſelfiſh ſcheme,
The ſtern reſolve unmoved by pity's ſmart,
The troublous day, and long diſtreſsful dream.—
Return, my rambling Muſe, reſume thy purpoſed theme.

XIII.

There lived in Gothic days, as legends tell,
A ſhepherd-ſwain, a man of low degree;
Whoſe ſires, perchance, in Fairyland might dwell,
Sicilian groves, or vales of Arcady;
But he, I ween, was of the north countrie *:
A nation famed for ſong, and beauty's charms;
Zealous, yet modeſt; innocent, though free;
Patient of toil; ſerene amidſt alarms;
Inflexible in faith; invincible in arms.

* There is hardly an ancient ballad, or romance, wherein a Minſtrel or Harper appears, but he is characteriſed, by way of eminence, to have been "OF THE NORTH "COUNTRIE." PERCY'S ESSAY ON THE ENGLISH MINSTRELS, p. 21. 22.

XIV.

The ſhepherd-ſwain of whom I mention made,
On Scotia's mountains fed his little flock;
The ſickle, ſcythe, or plough, he never ſway'd;
An honeſt heart was almoſt all his ſtock;
His drink the living water from the rock:
The milky dams ſupplied his board, and lent
Their kindly fleece to baffle winter's ſhock;
And he, though oft with duſt and ſweat beſprent,
Did guide and guard their wanderings, whereſoe'er they went.

XV.

From labour health, from health contentment ſprings.
Contentment opes the ſource of every joy.
He envied not, he never thought of kings;
Nor from thoſe appetites ſuſtain'd annoy,
Which chance may fruſtrate, or indulgence cloy:
Nor Fate his calm and humble hopes beguiled;
He mourn'd no recreant friend, nor miſtreſs coy,
For on his vows the blameleſs Phebe ſmiled,
And her alone he loved, and loved her from a child.

XVI.

No jealouſy their dawn of love o'ercaſt,
Nor blaſted were their wedded days with ſtrife;
Each ſeaſon look'd delightful, as it paſt,
To the fond huſband, and the faithful wife.
Beyond the lowly vale of ſhepherd life
They never roam'd; ſecure beneath the ſtorm
Which in Ambition's lofty land is rife,
Where peace and love are canker'd by the worm
Of pride, each bud of joy induſtrious to deform.

XVII.

The wight whoſe tale theſe artleſs lines unfold,
Was all the offſpring of this ſimple pair.
His birth no oracle or ſeer foretold:
No prodigy appear'd in earth or air,
Nor aught that might a ſtrange event declare.
You gueſs each circumſtance of EDWIN's birth;
The parent's tranſport, and the parent's care;
The goſſip's prayer for wealth, and wit, and worth;
And one long ſummer-day of indolence and mirth.

XVIII.

And yet poor Edwin was no vulgar boy;
Deep thought oft ſeem'd to fix his infant eye.
Dainties he heeded not, nor gaude, nor toy,
Save one ſhort pipe of rudeſt minſtrelſy.
Silent when glad; affectionate, though ſhy;
And now his look was moſt demurely ſad,
And now he laugh'd aloud, yet none knew why.
The neighbours ſtared and ſigh'd, yet bleſs'd the lad:
Some deem'd him wondrous wiſe, and ſome believed him mad.

XIX.

But why ſhould I his childiſh feats diſplay?
Concourſe, and noiſe, and toil, he ever fled;
Nor cared to mingle in the clamorous fray
Of ſquabbling imps; but to the foreſt ſped,
Or roam'd at large the lonely mountain's head;
Or, where the maze of ſome bewilder'd ſtream
To deep untrodden groves his footſteps led,
There would he wander wild, till Phebus' beam,
Shot from the weſtern cliff, releaſed the weary team.

XX.

Th' exploit of ſtrength, dexterity, or ſpeed,
To him nor vanity nor joy could bring.
His heart, from cruel ſport eſtranged, would bleed
To work the wo of any living thing,
By trap, or net; by arrow, or by ſling;
Theſe he deteſted, thoſe he ſcorn'd to wield:
He wiſh'd to be the guardian, not the king,
Tyrant far leſs, or traitor of the field.
And ſure the ſylvan reign unbloody joy might yield.

XXI.

Lo! where the ſtripling, wrapt in wonder, roves
Beneath the precipice o'erhung with pine;
And ſees, on high, amidſt th' encircling groves,
From cliff to cliff the foaming torrents ſhine:
While waters, woods, and winds, in concert join,
And Echo ſwells the chorus to the ſkies.
Would Edwin this majeſtic ſcene reſign
For aught the huntſman's puny craft ſupplies?
Ah! no: he better knows great Nature's charms to prize.

XXII.

And oft he traced the uplands, to ſurvey,
When o'er the ſky advanced the kindling dawn,
The crimſon cloud, blue main, and mountain grey,
And lake, dim-gleaming on the ſmoky lawn;
Far to the weſt the long long vale withdrawn,
Where twilight loves to linger for a while;
And now he faintly kens the bounding fawn,
And villager abroad at early toil. —
But, lo! the ſun appears! and heaven, earth, ocean, ſmile.

XXIII.

And oft the craggy cliff he loved to climb,
When all in miſt the world below was loſt.
What dreadful pleaſure! there to ſtand ſublime,
Like ſhipwreck'd mariner on deſert coaſt,
And view th' enormous waſte of vapour, toſt
In billows, lengthening to th' horizon round,
Now ſcoop'd in gulfs, with mountains now emboſs'd!
And hear the voice of mirth and ſong rebound,
Flocks, herds, and waterfalls, along the hoar profound!

XXIV.

In truth he was a ſtrange and wayward wight,
Fond of each gentle, and each dreadful ſcene.
In darkneſs, and in ſtorm, he found delight:
Nor leſs, than when on ocean-wave ſerene
The ſouthern ſun diffuſed his dazzling ſhene.
Even ſad viciſſitude amuſed his ſoul:
And if a ſigh would ſometimes intervene,
And down his cheek a tear of pity roll,
A ſigh, a tear, ſo ſweet, he wiſh'd not to control.

XXV.

" O ye wild groves, O where is now your bloom!"
(The Muſe interprets thus his tender thought.)
" Your flowers, your verdure, and your balmy gloom,
" Of late ſo grateful in the hour of drought!
" Why do the birds, that ſong and rapture brought
" To all your bowers, their manſions now forſake?
" Ah! why hath fickle chance this ruin wrought?
" For now the ſtorm howls mournful through the brake,
" And the dead foliage flies in many a ſhapeleſs flake.

XXVI.

" Where now the rill, melodious, pure, and cool,
" And meads, with life, and mirth, and beauty, crown'd!
" Ah! ſee, th' unſightly ſlime, and ſluggiſh pool,
" Have all the ſolitary vale imbrown'd;
" Fled each fair form, and mute each melting ſound.
" The raven croaks forlorn on naked ſpray:
" And, hark! the river, burſting every mound,
" Down the vale thunders; and, with waſteful ſway,
" Uproots the grove, and rolls the ſhatter'd rocks away.

XXVII.

" Yet ſuch the deſtiny of all on earth:
" So flouriſhes and fades majeſtic man.
" Fair is the bud his vernal morn brings forth,
" And foſtering gales a while the nurſling fan.
" O ſmile, ye heavens, ſerene; ye mildews wan,
" Ye blighting whirlwinds, ſpare his balmy prime,
" Nor leſſen of his life the little ſpan.
" Born on the ſwift, though ſilent, wings of Time,
" Old-age comes on apace to ravage all the clime.

XXVIII.

" And be it ſo. Let thoſe deplore their doom,
" Whoſe hope ſtill grovels in this dark ſojourn.
" But lofty ſouls, who look beyond the tomb,
" Can ſmile at Fate, and wonder how they mourn.
" Shall ſpring to theſe ſad ſcenes no more return?
" Is yonder wave the ſun's eternal bed?—
" Soon ſhall the orient with new luſtre burn,
" And ſpring ſhall ſoon her vital influence ſhed,
" Again attune the grove, again adorn the mead.

XXIX.

" Shall I be left abandon'd in the duſt,
" When Fate, relenting, lets the flower revive?
" Shall Nature's voice, to man alone unjuſt,
" Bid him, though doom'd to periſh, hope to live?
" Is it for this fair Virtue oft muſt ſtrive
" With diſappointment, penury, and pain?—
" No: Heaven's immortal ſpring ſhall yet arrive;
" And man's majeſtic beauty bloom again,
" Bright through th' eternal year of Love's triumphant reign."

XXX.

This truth ſublime his ſimple ſire had taught.
In ſooth, 'twas almoſt all the ſhepherd knew.
No ſubtle nor ſuperfluous lore he ſought,
Nor ever wiſh'd his Edwin to purſue.
" Let man's own ſphere (quoth he) confine his view,
" Be man's peculiar work his ſole delight."
And much, and oft, he warn'd him, to eſchew
Falſehood and guile, and aye maintain the right,
By pleaſure unſeduced, unawed by lawleſs might.

XXXI.

" And, from the prayer of Want, and plaint of Wo,
" O never, never turn away thine ear.
" Forlorn, in this bleak wilderneſs below,
" Ah! what were man, ſhould Heaven refuſe to hear!
" To others do (the law is not ſevere)
" What to thyſelf thou wiſheſt to be done.
" Forgive thy foes; and love thy parents dear,
" And friends, and native land; nor thoſe alone;
" All human weal and wo learn thou to make thine own."

XXXII.

See, in the rear of the warm ſunny ſhower,
The viſionary boy from ſhelter fly!
For now the ſtorm of ſummer-rain is o'er,
And cool, and freſh, and fragrant, is the ſky.
And, lo! in the dark eaſt, expanded high,
The rainbow brightens to the ſetting ſun!
Fond fool, that deem'ſt the ſtreaming glory nigh,
How vain the chace thine ardour has begun!
'Tis fled afar, ere half thy purpoſed race be run.

XXXIII.

Yet couldſt thou learn, that thus it fares with age,
When pleaſure, wealth, or power, the boſom warm,
This baffled hope might tame thy manhood's rage,
And Diſappointment of her ſting diſarm.—
But why ſhould foreſight thy fond heart alarm?
Periſh the lore that deadens young deſire!
Purſue, poor imp, th' imaginary charm,
Indulge gay Hope, and Fancy's pleaſing fire:
Fancy and Hope too ſoon ſhall of themſelves expire.

XXXIV.

When the long-ſounding curfew from afar
Loaded with loud lament the lonely gale,
Young Edwin, lighted by the evening-ſtar,
Lingering and liſtening, wander'd down the vale.
There would he dream of graves, and corſes pale;
And ghoſts, that to the charnel-dungeon throng,
And drag a length of clanking chain, and wail,
Till ſilenced by the owl's terrific ſong,
Or blaſt that ſhrieks by fits the ſhuddering iſles along.

XXXV.

Or, when the ſetting moon, in crimſon dyed,
Hung o'er the dark and melancholy deep,
To haunted ſtream, remote from man, he hied,
Where Fays of yore their revels wont to keep;
And there let Fancy roam at large, till ſleep
A viſion brought to his intranced ſight.
And firſt, a wildly-murmuring wind 'gan creep
Shrill to his ringing ear; then tapers bright,
With inſtantaneous gleam, illumed the vault of Night.

XXXVI.

Anon in view a portal's blazon'd arch
Aroſe; the trumpet bids the valves unfold;
And forth an hoſt of little warriors march,
Graſping the diamond lance, and targe of gold.
Their look was gentle, their demeanour bold,
And green their helms, and green their ſilk attire;
And here and there, right venerably old,
The long-robed minſtrels wake the warbling wire,
And ſome with mellow breath the martial pipe inſpire.

XXXVII.

With merriment, and ſong, and timbrels clear,
A troop of dames from myrtle bowers advance;
The little warriors doff the targe and ſpear,
And loud enlivening ſtrains provoke the dance.
They meet, they dart away, they wheel aſkance;
To right, to left, they thrid the flying maze;
Now bound aloft with vigorous ſpring, then glance
Rapid along: with many-colour'd rays
Of tapers, gems, and gold, the echoing foreſts blaze.

XXXVIII.

The dream is fled. Proud harbinger of day,
Who ſcaredſt the viſion with thy clarion ſhrill,
Fell chanticleer! who oft haſt reft away
My fancied good, and brought ſubſtantial ill!
O to thy curſed ſcream, diſcordant ſtill,
Let Harmony aye ſhut her gentle ear:
Thy boaſtful mirth let jealous rivals ſpill,
Inſult thy creſt, and gloſſy pinions tear,
And ever in thy dreams the ruthleſs fox appear.

XXXIX.

Forbear, my Muſe. Let Love attune thy line.
Revoke the ſpell. Thine Edwin frets not ſo.
For how ſhould he at wicked chance repine,
Who feels from every change amuſement flow?
Even now his eyes with ſmiles of rapture glow,
As on he wanders through the ſcenes of morn,
Where the freſh flowers in living luſtre blow,
Where thouſand pearls the dewy lawns adorn,
A thouſand notes of joy in every breeze are born.

XL.

But who the melodies of morn can tell?
The wild brook babbling down the mountain-ſide;
The lowing herd; the ſheepfold's ſimple bell;
The pipe of early ſhepherd dim deſcried
In the lone valley; echoing far and wide
The clamorous horn along the cliffs above;
The hollow murmur of the ocean-tide;
The hum of bees, and linnet's lay of love,
And the full choir that wakes the univerſal grove.

XLI.

The cottage-curs at early pilgrim bark;
Crown'd with her pail the tripping milkmaid ſings;
The whiſtling plowman ſtalks afield; and, hark!
Down the rough ſlope the ponderous waggon rings;
Through ruſtling corn the hare aſtoniſh'd ſprings;
Slow tolls the village-clock the drowſy hour;
The partridge burſts away on whirring wings;
Deep mourns the turtle in ſequeſter'd bower,
And ſhrill lark carols clear from her aereal tour.

XLII.

O Nature, how in every charm ſupreme!
Whoſe votaries feaſt on raptures ever new!
O for the voice and fire of ſeraphim,
To ſing thy glories with devotion due!
Bleſt be the day I ſcap'd the wrangling crew,
From Pyrrho's maze, and Epicurus' ſty;
And held high converſe with the godlike few,
Who to th' enraptured heart, and ear, and eye,
Teach beauty, virtue, truth, and love, and melody.

XLIII.

Hence! ye, who ſnare and ſtupefy the mind,
Sophiſts, of beauty, virtue, joy, the bane!
Greedy and fell, though impotent and blind,
Who ſpread your filthy nets in Truth's fair fane,
And ever ply your venom'd fangs àmain!
Hence to dark Error's den, whoſe rankling ſlime
Firſt gave you form! hence! leſt the Muſe ſhould deign,
(Though loth on theme ſo mean to waſte a rhyme),
With vengeance to purſue your ſacrilegious crime.

XLIV.

But hail, ye mighty maſters of the lay,
Nature's true ſons, the friends of man and truth!
Whoſe ſong, ſublimely ſweet, ſerenely gay,
Amuſed my childhood, and inform'd my youth.
O let your ſpirit ſtill my boſom ſooth,
Inſpire my dreams, and my wild wanderings guide.
Your voice each rugged path of life can ſmooth;
For well I know, where-ever ye reſide,
There harmony, and peace, and innocence, abide.

XLV.

Ah me! abandon'd on the loneſome plain,
As yet poor Edwin never knew your lore,
Save when againſt the winter's drenching rain,
And driving ſnow, the cottage ſhut the door.
Then, as inſtructed by tradition hoar,
Her legends when the Beldam 'gan impart,
Or chant the old heroic ditty o'er,
Wonder and joy ran thrilling to his heart;
Much he the tale admired, but more the tuneful art.

XLVI.

Various and ſtrange was the long-winded tale;
And halls, and knights, and feats of arms, diſplay'd;
Or merry ſwains, who quaff the nut-brown ale,
And ſing, enamour'd of the nut-brown maid;
The moonlight-revel of the fairy glade;
Or hags, that ſuckle an infernal brood,
And ply in caves th' unutterable trade,
'Midſt fiends and ſpectres, quench the moon in blood,
Yell in the midnight ſtorm, or ride th' infuriate flood.

XLVII.

But when to horror his amazement roſe,
A gentler ſtrain the Beldam would rehearſe,
A tale of rural life, a tale of woes,
The orphan-babes, and guardian uncle fierce.
O cruel! will no pang of pity pierce
That heart by luſt of lucre ſear'd to ſtone!
For ſure, if aught of virtue laſt, or verſe,
To lateſt times ſhall tender ſouls bemoan
Thoſe helpleſs orphan-babes by thy fell arts undone.

XLVIII.

Behold, with berries ſmear'd, with brambles torn *,
The babes now famiſh'd lay them down to die,
'Midſt the wild howl of darkſome woods forlorn,
Folded in one another's arms they lie;
Nor friend, nor ſtranger, hears their dying cry:
" For from the town the man returns no more."
But thou, who Heaven's juſt vengeance dareſt defy,
This deed with fruitleſs tears ſhalt ſoon deplore,
When Death lays waſte thy houſe, and flames conſume thy ſtore.

XLIX.

A ſtifled ſmile of ſtern vindictive joy
Brighten'd one moment Edwin's ſtarting tear. —
" But why ſhould gold man's feeble mind decoy,
" And Innocence thus die by doom ſevere?"
O Edwin, while thy heart is yet ſincere,
Th' aſſaults of diſcontent and doubt repel:
Dark even at noontide is our mortal ſphere;
But let us hope,—to doubt, is to rebel, —
Let us exult in hope, that all ſhall yet be well.

* See the fine old ballad, called, THE CHILDREN IN THE WOOD.

L.

Nor be thy generous indignation check'd,
Nor check'd the tender tear to Miſery given;
From Guilt's contagious power ſhall that protect,
This ſoften and refine the ſoul for heaven.
But dreadful is their doom, whom doubt hath driven
To cenſure Fate, and pious hope forego:
Like yonder blaſted boughs by lightning riven,
Perfection, beauty, life, they never know,
But frown on all that paſs, a monument of wo.

LI.

Shall he, whoſe birth, maturity, and age,
Scarce fill the circle of one ſummer-day,
Shall the poor gnat with diſcontent and rage
Exclaim, that Nature haſtens to decay,
If but a cloud obſtruct the ſolar ray,
If but a momentary ſhower deſcend!
Or ſhall frail man Heaven's dread decree gainſay,
Which bade the ſeries of events extend
Wide through unnumber'd worlds, and ages without end!

LII.

One part, one little part, we dimly ſcan
Through the dark medium of life's feveriſh dream;
Yet dare arraign the whole ſtupendous plan,
If but that little part incongruous ſeem.
Nor is that part perhaps what mortals deem;
Oft from apparent ill our bleſſings riſe.
O then renounce that impious ſelf-eſteem,
That aims to trace the ſecrets of the ſkies:
For thou art but of duſt; be humble, and be wiſe.

LIII.

Thus Heaven enlarged his ſoul in riper years.
For Nature gave him ſtrength, and fire, to ſoar,
On Fancy's wing, above this vale of tears;
Where dark cold-hearted ſceptics, creeping, pore
Through microſcope of metaphyſic lore:
And much they grope for truth, but never hit.
For why? their powers, inadequate before,
This art prepoſterous renders more unfit;
Yet deem they darkneſs light, and their vain blunders wit.

LIV.

Nor was this ancient dame a foe to mirth.
Her ballad, jeſt, and riddle's quaint device
Oft chear'd the ſhepherds round their ſocial hearth;
Whom levity or ſpleen could ne'er entice
To purchaſe chat or laughter at the price
Of decency. Nor let it faith exceed,
That Nature forms a ruſtic taſte ſo nice.—
Ah! had they been of court or city breed,
Such delicacy were right marvellous indeed.

LV.

Oft when the winter-ſtorm had ceas'd to rave,
He roam'd the ſnowy waſte at even, to view
The cloud ſtupendous, from th' Atlantic wave
High-towering, ſail along th' horizon blue:
Where midſt the changeful ſcenery ever new
Fancy a thouſand wondrous forms deſcries
More wildly great than ever pencil drew,
Rocks, torrents, gulfs, and ſhapes of giant ſize,
And glittering cliffs on cliffs, and fiery ramparts riſe.

LVI.

Thence muſing onward to the ſounding ſhore,
The lone enthuſiaſt oft would take his way,
Liſtening with pleaſing dread to the deep roar
Of the wide-weltering waves. In black array
When ſulphurous clouds roll'd on the vernal day,
Even then he haſten'd from the haunt of man,
Along the darkening wilderneſs to ſtray,
What time the lightning's fierce career began,
And o'er heaven's rending arch the rattling thunder ran.

LVII.

Reſponſive to the ſprightly pipe when all
In ſprightly dance the village-youth were join'd,
Edwin, of melody aye held in thrall,
From the rude gambol far remote reclined,
Sooth'd with the ſoft notes warbling in the wind.
Ah then, all jollity ſeem'd noiſe and folly.
To the pure ſoul by Fancy's fire refined
Ah what is mirth, but turbulence unholy,
When with the charm compared of heavenly melancholy!

LVIII.

Is there a heart that muſic cannot melt?
Ah me! how is that rugged heart forlorn!
Is there, who ne'er thoſe myſtic tranſports felt
Of ſolitude and melancholy born?
He needs not woo the Muſe; he is her ſcorn.
The ſophiſt's rope of cobweb he ſhall twine;
Mope o'er the ſchoolman's peeviſh page; or mourn,
And delve for life, in Mammon's dirty mine;
Sneak with the ſcoundrel fox, or grunt with glutton ſwine.

LIX.

For Edwin Fate a nobler doom had plann'd;
Song was his favourite and firſt purſuit.
The wild harp rang to his adventurous hand,
And languiſh'd to his breath the plaintive flute.
His infant muſe, though artleſs, was not mute:
Of elegance as yet he took no care;
For this of time and culture is the fruit;
And Edwin gain'd at laſt this fruit ſo rare:
As in ſome future verſe I purpoſe to declare.

LX.

Meanwhile, whate'er of beautiful, or new,
Sublime, or dreadful, in earth, ſea, or ſky,
By chance, or ſearch, was offer'd to his view,
He ſcann'd with curious and romantic eye.
Whate'er of lore tradition could ſupply
From Gothic tale, or ſong, or fable old,
Rous'd him, ſtill keen to liſten and to pry.
At laſt, though long by penury control'd,
And ſolitude, his ſoul her graces 'gan unfold.

LXI.

Thus on the chill Lapponian's dreary land,
For many a long month loſt in ſnow profound,
When Sol from Cancer ſends the ſeaſon bland,
And in their northern cave the ſtorms hath bound;
From ſilent mountains, ſtraight, with ſtartling ſound,
Torrents are hurl'd; green hills emerge; and lo,
The trees with foliage, cliffs with flowers are crown'd;
Pure rills through vales of verdure warbling go;
And wonder, love, and joy, the peaſant's heart o'erflow *.

* Spring and Autumn are hardly known to the Laplanders. About the time the ſun enters Cancer, their fields, which a week before were covered with ſnow, appear on a ſudden full of graſs and flowers. SCHEFFER'S HIST. OF LAPLAND, p. 16.

LXII.

Here pauſe, my Gothic lyre, a little while.
The leiſure hour is all that thou canſt claim.
But if * * * * * on this labour ſmile,
New ſtrains erelong ſhall animate thy frame.
And his applauſe to me is more than fame;
For ſtill with truth accords his taſte refined.
At lucre or renown let others aim,
I only wiſh to pleaſe the gentle mind,
Whom Nature's charms inſpire, and love of humankind.

THE END.